Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
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Saskatchewan

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Log Number: 06-49-225
Week of December 4, 2006

4-H KEEPS CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

Even though it has been operating in Saskatchewan for almost 90 years, 4-H has never been an organization that rests on its laurels.

Valerie Pearson, the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan 4-H Council, says the agency is always looking at ways to ensure it remains relevant to youth, while, at the same time, maintaining its core values and objectives.

"We've always said our claim to fame is our leadership. We're developing responsible citizens for the future, to take leadership roles," Pearson explained. "But that's not always a good selling pitch to an eight-year-old or a 10-year-old, so we really strive to promote the fun aspect of belonging to a 4-H club in everything we do. While having fun, there are all sorts of activities through which these young people learn leadership skills, which is certainly something that parents appreciate."

Pearson said a new national initiative has been undertaken which will soon thrust 4-H more prominently into the spotlight. The initiative was largely spearheaded by 4-H members from across Canada, who were given the opportunity to apply to be part of a "youth advertising team" for the organization, she noted.

The team spent two weekends working with advertising agencies to develop ads for a public awareness and promotional campaign that will roll out across the nation in the coming months, targeting young people.

"The initiative just launched on October 31, so we'll be starting to see radio and TV ads down the road as things get into full swing," Pearson noted. "The horse isn't out of the barn yet, but it's approaching the gate."

Pearson said the main reason for the campaign was to ensure people know and understand what the 4-H program is all about, and to attract new members to the organization. "In some areas, our membership has been declining over the years, and we want to address that," she stated. "This is one way we felt we could get youth interested in 4-H, to learn about the program and to join the program, eventually."

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The 4-H program in Saskatchewan is in good shape overall, Pearson said, but the Provincial Council is fully behind the initiative to increase membership.

"In the last couple of years, we've developed many new programs. We've got these programs in place, as well as new and energetic staff who are going out and meeting with clubs and districts as much as they can," she stated. "Now we're going to shift our focus to increasing our membership numbers, as well, for the long-term stability of 4-H in Saskatchewan."

One of the more recent initiatives of 4-H in Saskatchewan has been to work more closely with First Nations in attracting youth and introducing new learning components. "We're working hand-in-hand with the First Nations Agricultural Council of Saskatchewan," Pearson said. "The goals of both organizations are essentially the same. We both want to work with youth; we both want to pass on information to the youth through knowledgeable, respected people. The First Nations call them elders; we call them leaders. Since we're trying to do the same thing, and 4-H has an effective model already in place, we felt it would be very beneficial for us to work together."

First Nations' participation in 4-H is beginning to increase, as a result, both within existing clubs and in the establishment of new clubs on reserves where sufficient interest exists. For example, almost 40 youth from Turner Lake, in the northern part of the province, recently attended a 4-H night.

The partnership has also enabled 4-H to augment its current programming with an aboriginal learning component. "A couple of years ago we received some federal funding through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada," Pearson said. "We were able to have some aboriginal project material written for us by aboriginal people, themselves, covering topics such as culture and traditions, foods, quilting and so forth. This material is available for all clubs to use, so that non-aboriginal 4-H members can also learn about another culture."

Pearson says that young people who participate in 4-H clubs get hands-on experience doing a lot of neat things, while at the same time learning new skills, building leadership qualities and, most importantly, having fun. "We always stick to our motto: 'Learn to do by doing.' This is an organization that lets everyone try, lets everyone excel," she said. "And you can bet they're going to have fun doing it."

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EXPERT ON AI TO TEACH PRODUCER WORKSHOP

When a man's got more than three decades of experience under his belt, you'd be hard-pressed to find a more knowledgeable authority. Given the credentials of Albert Harrison, producers attending the upcoming Artificial Insemination (AI) School in Shaunavon will have a chance to learn from a real expert.

"I've been in the business for over 35 years," said Harrison. "I run an artificial insemination business out of Swift Current, arming anywhere from two to three thousand head of cattle a year for customers."

Harrison will be the instructor for a comprehensive five-day workshop on AI, scheduled to take place December 12-16 at the Shaunavon Auction Mart. Producers taking the course will receive extensive training in all aspects of AI.

"What they're going to do is go through anatomy and physiology, they're going to learn about the process of artificially inseminating cattle, about semen handling and placement, about proper storage and the liquid nitrogen tanks where you keep the semen, and a whole lot more" said Harrison. "I have a number of speakers come in, like nutritionists, veterinarians, and owners from a couple of different studs."

But the training won't be limited to the classroom. Harrison notes that a considerable portion of the workshop will be spent in the barn, learning through doing. "We spend about an hour-and-a-half in the classroom in the morning and an hour-and-a-half in the afternoon, and the rest of the time is spent working on live cows," he said.

The AI School would be of interest to anyone in the cattle business or dairy industry, according to Harrison, since the practice offers a number of significant benefits over conventional livestock breeding. The primary benefit is genetics, particularly the ability to select from a broader range of bulls with specific characteristics that a producer might want to match with his or her cows.

Artificial insemination is cost-effective from the standpoint of not having to purchase, feed and keep as many bulls on the farm. Additionally, AI offers the opportunity for farmers to better co-ordinate their calving period. "If you synchronize a group of 100 head through AI, you're going to have the ones that conceive on that breeding drop their calves [within a period of] probably 10 days; whereas, if you have them bull-bred, it's spread out over at least 30 days, if they all conceive on that breeding," said Harrison.

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"So if you're a producer, that puts more pounds on the calves, more pounds when you sell them, more money in your pocket."

Harrison notes that even people who don't intend to practice AI on their farms have taken his course in the past, simply because it is so comprehensive. "Some people go just for the education part of it, whether they arm any cows afterward or not, because what they learn at the school really opens their eyes to their own operations."

The cost of attending the AI School is $800 per person for the full five-day workshop. However, it is recognized as an approved course under the federal Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS) program, meaning that farmers who have qualified for CASS can obtain funding to help defray their costs. Producers interested in finding out more about CASS, including whether or not they might be eligible, can call toll-free 1-888-887-7977.

To register for the AI School on December 12-16 in Shaunavon, producers can call Albert Harrison at (306) 297-3139.

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Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS)
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AG HEALTH AND SAFETY GETS BIG BOOST WITH DONATIONS

The Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture (CCHSA) at the University of Saskatchewan is having a celebratory month, with a 20th anniversary as well as new donations to its "Founding Chairs" program.

The CCHSA held an appreciation event in November to celebrate contributions to its "Founding Chairs" program from some familiar agricultural partners: Farm Credit Canada (FCC), Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL), the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool (SWP) and a special investment from the University of Saskatchewan (U of S).

The three companies each donated $250,000 towards the program, which provides research funds for special projects, student training and knowledge translation in the area of agricultural health and safety. The University of Saskatchewan committed $125,000 to the program from the Dr. Peter D. Stewart Trust.

"These organizations, Farm Credit Canada, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and Federated Co-op, are intricately linked to the very people that the CCHSA reaches out to – farm families and workers," said Dr. James Dosman, Director of the CCHSA.

A portion of the funds will be used to help equip the centre when it makes the move to new headquarters in the Academic Health Sciences Building on the U of S campus. The remainder of the funds will go toward new research projects or ongoing development of existing projects.

Acknowledging two decades of projects and research is also on the agenda for CCHSA in early December. The centre is celebrating the evolution it has undergone since its beginnings as the Centre for Agricultural Medicine. The CCHSA is now co-located with the Institute of Agricultural Rural and Environmental Health (IAREH) at the U of S. It officially turns 20 this month, and its anniversary celebrations are taking place at various locations throughout Saskatoon.

"The anniversary celebrates how the Centre for Agricultural Medicine has kept evolving and growing over the last 20 years to become a national centre of excellence," said Maura Gillis-Cipywnyk with IAREH.

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The CCHSA is now home to a national lab, as well as being linked to a network of 66 scientists working at 14 different universities across the country. The scientists and their research focus on four themes of agricultural health: what we breathe, what we eat and drink, how we work and how we live. "This centre is the first of its kind in Canada," said Gillis-Cipywnyk.

Anniversary celebrations include several conferences looking at various research issues, including a research conference on farm injuries that examines the issues and competencies that underlie injury prevention strategies.

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FEEDS INNOVATION INSTITUTE EMPHASIZES VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTION

He's only been on the job for a few months, but the executive director of the new Feeds Innovation Institute (FII) is excited by what's happening.

Dr. Scott Wright heads the institute, based at the University of Saskatchewan. The FII evolved from the former Prairie Feed Research Centre, which had been operating at the university under the leadership of Vern Racz.

"While Vern has retired as executive director, he continues to work with us as a consulting research scientist," said Wright. "We are fortunate to have his experience and the continuity he provides."

According to Wright, "There has been scientific co-operation. The gap has been in connecting that to the industry priorities and to value-creation. We have a clearly expanding and growing market for enhanced livestock production in the province, as well as a demand for specialized feed products." He sees the FII as "moving from a pure science response to a broader business and enterprise development response in the emerging markets for new feed crop technologies and processes."

Currently, though Saskatchewan produces around 50 per cent of Canada's grain crop, only about 10 per cent of that production is being used for domestic feed.

Wright noted, "We're only just beginning to get a solid handle on value chain development, and how to create workable value chains that share risk-for-profit in a highly globalized market."

He points to the tonnes of grain screenings now being used to feed livestock and the development of the new super-oat strain as just some of the evidence that feed research and development is paying off in the field.

The FII will emphasize partnerships and draw on the strength of the bio-products innovation cluster centred at the University of Saskatchewan. This cluster includes the Departments of Animal and Poultry Science, Agriculture Economics, Bioresource Engineering and the Crop Development Centre. It will also maintain close links with associated groups like the Prairie Swine Centre, Ag-West Bio Inc. and PAMI, to name a few.

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In the short term, Wright says the institute's work will "focus on creating additional value from feed in areas of the bio-economy like bio-fuels, and in satisfying demand for specialized feed products." He also looks forward to future work on what he calls the "golden triangle:" the relationship between crops used for animal feed, crops used for food and crops used for industrial purposes.

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MAJOR GRAZING AND FORAGE CONFERENCE SET FOR SWIFT CURRENT

A major livestock and grazing event is set to occur in Swift Current on December 12-13. This will be the fourth "Foraging into the Future" workshop to take place in the city, with the theme of this year's session being "Understanding Selective Grazing Behaviour on the Range."

Previous "Foraging into the Future" workshops have attracted anywhere from 125-225 participants. Trevor Lennox, a Forage Development Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), says organizers are expecting the 2006 version to be just as well-received, if not more popular.

"The workshop will put producers in contact with some of North America's leading forage and grazing researchers," Lennox noted.

One such expert is Dr. Derek Bailey of New Mexico State University, who will speak about improving ranch profitability by selecting animals that are better adapted to the topography of one's rangeland. In this session, Bailey will address topics such as grazing distribution and why it matters to producers, differences in the ability of individual animals to graze rugged farmland, and better developing animals to their rangeland conditions.

Bailey will further discuss his research on using grazing management tools, such as supplemental feeding and herding, to improve animal distribution into areas where forage resources are underutilized. He will also speak on the use of livestock as a tool to improve wildlife habitat on rangeland.

Dr. Jeff Mosley from Montana State University will help producers gain a better understanding of grazing behaviour of rangeland cattle, and what techniques can be used for limiting the affects of grazing on riparian areas. By understanding their habits, farmers can better manage where cattle will graze on their rangeland.

"Retaining youth in agriculture is an issue near and dear to the hearts of everyone involved in the industry," said Lennox. "That topic will be discussed at this year's conference by Christoph Weder, recently named the 2006 Alberta Outstanding Young Farmer, who will be sharing his experiences with participants."

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Weder recently left his job as a beef specialist in Alberta to pursue his dream of ranching on a full-time basis. He will also talk about methods he has found to improve the cow/calf producer's profitability in the beef industry.

A popular feature that will continue from previous workshops is the producer panel, which, this year, will discuss various methods of improving distribution on rangeland. "The producer panel provides an excellent forum in which participants can hear what their colleagues are doing, and perhaps pick up some useful tips in the process," Lennox said.

A new item added for the 2006 workshop is "Tips and Tricks for Training Cattle Dogs," a topic that will be presented by a very popular trainer from southwest Saskatchewan. "Cattle dogs are an important asset when it comes to working with animals, and this session will give producers an inside perspective from the eyes of a professional dog handler," Lennox stated.

The program will finish with several updates from groups doing forage research on the Canadian Prairies, including the Western Beef Development Centre in Lanigan, the Chinook Applied Research Association in Oyen, Alberta, and the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research facilities in Swift Current, Scott and Brandon.

The planning committee has worked hard to attract funding for this event, and is very proud to be able to offer a two-day event of this quality for only $50 per person or $80 per family couple. Producers interested in attending the workshop must pre-register by calling the SAF regional office in Swift Current at (306) 778-8285.

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